

REMARKS

Claims 11 and 16 have been amended. Claims 1-10, 12, 17-19 and 23-24 have been cancelled. Claim 25 has been added. Support for the amendments can be found at least at ¶¶ [0010], [0011], [0016], and [0017]. Support for the new claim can be found at least at ¶¶ [0010] and [0011]. Thus, claims 11, 13-16, 20-22, and 25 are now pending in the current application. No new matter has been added. In light of the above amendments and the following remarks, Applicants respectfully submit that all presently pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Claims 11, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, and 24 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) for being anticipated by Merrifield et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,762,395).

Claim 11 has been amended and now recites a control panel for an automotive vehicle, comprising “*a frame structure that is force-absorbing determined by a grid profile which arranges linear elements extending along force flow lines, areas of the frame structure which are delimited by the linear elements being sealed at least partially by plastic sheet elements, the areas being covered with a decorative layer, the sheet elements being connected to the linear elements by an integral material connection, the frame structure being directly connected to at least one of an end wall and a body of the vehicle, the frame structure being constructed such that a cross-member arranged between A-columns of the vehicle is dispensable and the frame structure is made of fibres bonded with a thermoplastic material.*”

Merrifield discloses the desirability to make the cross car support structure 16 “generate a high moment of inertia and stiffness for providing sufficient torsional rigidity to the vehicle.” (See Merrifield, col. 4, ll. 55-60). However, Merrifield fails to disclose using a grid profile to arrange linear elements extending along force flow lines. Furthermore, Merrifield fails to disclose the frame structure made of fibres bonded with a thermoplastic material. Rather, Merrifield explains that “this invention provides a cross car support structure of an instrument panel having

a cross car beam which is preferably made entirely of plastic.” (*Id.*, col. 1, ll. 30-33). Applicants respectfully submit that the disclosure of plastic does not meet the recited *fibres bonded with a thermoplastic material*. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that claim 11 and its dependent claims 13 and 15 are allowable over Merrifield.

Claim 16 has been amended to recite a method for manufacturing of a control panel for an automotive vehicle comprising “providing a frame structure constructed from linear elements, areas of the frame structure being delimited by linear elements being sealed at least partially by plastic sheet elements; and covering the areas with a decorative layer, wherein the frame structure is constructed such that a cross-member arranged between the A-columns of the vehicle is dispensable and the frame structure is directly connected to at least one of an end wall and a body of the vehicle, *and an integral connection between the linear elements and the plastic sheet elements is achieved by surrounding the linear elements with a plastic material in a moulding tool thereby forming the integrally connected plastic sheet elements.*”

In contrast, Merrifield discloses the use of upwardly facing edges 21 of duct channels 20 to attach beam 40 to the instrument panel 60. (*See* Merrifield col. 3, ll. 49-54). Furthermore, Merrifield discloses that the method used in attaching beam 40 to instrument panel 60 can be “...by adhesive bonding, by vibration welding, by infrared welding, by hot plate welding...” (*Id.*, col. 4, ll. 43-50). Instrument panel 60 is already produced before the attachment process. Therefore, Merrifield fails to disclose that the plastic sheet elements are formed by surrounding the linear elements in a molding tool. Thus, it is respectfully submitted that claim 16 and its dependent claims 20 and 21 are also allowable over Merrifield.

Newly added claim 25 recites “[a] method for manufacturing a control panel for an automotive vehicle by defining areas to be cut out of a cuboid representing the cockpit region and defining loads on the cuboid to form the control panel, comprising the following steps: *determining a main force flow in the remaining cuboid by modeling a grid profile with grid lines*

along which linear elements of a frame structure of the control panel are to be arranged and providing bridging areas between the linear elements, such that a cross member is dispensable and the frame structure of the control panel is to be directly connected to at least one of an end wall and a body of the vehicle; and production of the thereby defined control panel in a moulding tool.”

Claim 25 recites limitations substantially similar to those of claim 11. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that claim 25 is also allowable over Merrifield for at least the same reasons previously mentioned with regard to claim 11.

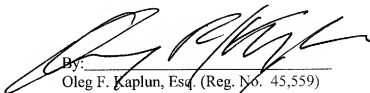
Claim 14 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) for being obvious with respect to Merrifield in view of Wada et al. (U.S. Patent No. 3,834,842). Claim 22 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) for being obvious with respect to Merrifield in view of Delmastro (U.S. Patent No. 6,354,623).

Applicants respectfully submit that Wada and Delmastro fail to cure the above mentioned deficiencies of Merrifield and that Merrifield, Wada, and Delmastro, taken alone or in any combination, fail to teach the limitations of claim 11 and 16. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that because claim 14 depends on claim 11 and claim 22 depends on claim 16, that these claims are allowable.

In light of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the pending claims are in condition for allowance. All issues raised by the Examiner having been addressed, an early and favorable action on the merits is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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